

Chapter 4

Building a RAFT (Part of Leaving)

During the leaving stage most people today leave their teammates when they depart from their host countries. It is a part of the leaving stage and needs consideration. The Israelites parted years later as they went to their homes as described in Joshua 22, so we turn to that now.

Part 1: The Longest Reentry

After the Israelites left Egypt, they traveled several months until they received the Ten Commandments and then traveled several more months to the border of their passport country, but they were afraid to enter it. Then they wandered for many years in the wilderness until they finally did cross the border into their passport country. After several years of taking possession of their country, they were ready to settle down and live there.

The Israelites were divided into twelve tribes which were to settle on different sides of the Jordan River. Nine and a half of the tribes were going to remain on the west bank, but Moses had promised the east bank to the other two and a half tribes. Joshua called the two and a half tribes together and commended them for not deserting their brothers and said, “You have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you,” and told them, “Return to your homes...on the other side of the Jordan” (Joshua 22:3-4).

Joshua then gave them a reminder to “be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses” gave, to

- love the Lord your God,
- walk in all his ways,
- obey his commands,
- hold fast to him,
- serve him with all your heart and all your soul (v. 5).

Before he sent them off to their homes he blessed them and reminded them of their

- great wealth,
- large herds of livestock,
- silver, gold, bronze, and iron,
- great quantity of clothing (v. 8).

On their way over to the east bank, they stopped and built a large altar on the west bank of the Jordan (v. 10). This was probably very near the spot they had camped and built an altar with stones from the bottom of the river when they entered the country several years earlier. The next few verses are the classical “good news”—“bad news” scenario.

- Good news? The two and a half tribes built an altar (v. 10).
- Bad news! The other Israelites on the west side of the river gathered to go to war against them (v. 12).
- Good news? The Israelites did not attack immediately, but sent Phineas and a committee of 10, one from each tribe on the west bank. (v. 12).
- Bad news! Phineas was not one to negotiate, but one to take drastic action (Numbers 25:1-9).
- Good news? Phineas and his committee spoke rather than speared (v. 15).
- Bad news! The speech was accusatory rather than

conciliatory (vv. 16-20).

- Good news! The two and a half tribes had a peacemaker among them.

As you get ready to part from your friends in your host country, your leader or leaders will probably gather everyone together to express appreciation and give you a blessing. As you part you may be surprised at some of the things that happen and find yourself caught in a “good news”—“bad news” scenario yourself.

Part 2: Reentry Today

The advice that Joshua gave to the Israelites thousands of years ago is still good today: Love God, walk in his ways, obey his commandments, hold fast to him and serve him with all you are. Cross-cultural workers today probably do not return to their passport countries with the same things that the Israelites had, but they return with eternal wealth that moths, rust, and thieves cannot steal or destroy.

Dave Pollock pointed out that if you wanted to enter right, you had to leave right. To leave right he suggested that you build a RAFT, an acronym for Reconciliation, Affirmation, Farewells, and Thinking destination. At this point in Joshua it was certainly time to build a RAFT!

Although Phineas was not a good one to build a RAFT, fortunately someone in the two and a half tribes was. The first step in building a RAFT is Reconciliation.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation means doing whatever it takes to heal any broken relationships before you leave. Phineas had not taken a good approach to healing a relationship. Rather he

came pointing an accusing finger saying, “How could you? How could you?” Looking at the reply by the two and a half tribes (Joshua 22:22-29), we find five things that can lead to reconciliation. The vowels of the English language help us remember what they are.

Acknowledge the Almighty. First, their reply begins with, “The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows!” Beginning with acknowledging that you both serve the same God, that you are both building the same kingdom is very important. This way you establish a common ground for both parties, a point of agreement from which you can rebuild the relationship.

Explain your Excogitations. Yes, “excogitations” really is a word—it begins with “E” and means your thoughts.

The second thing you need to do is to explain, clarifying your intentions and motives. Notice how they attempted to do that over and over at the beginning of many verses.

- “No! We did it for fear that...” (v. 24).
- “That is why we said...” (v. 26).
- “On the contrary, it is to be...” (v. 27).
- “And we said...” (v. 28).
- “Far be it from us to rebel...” (v. 29).

Giving these repeated explanations, they were trying to get the other Israelites to understand what they intended while doing what they had done. Of course, at the same time they were trying to understand how the other Israelites interpreted the same things. Likewise, as you explain your intentions when misunderstood, remember to make an effort to understand how the other person perceived them. Paraphrasing them by saying something like, “What I hear you saying is _____”

(you say the same thing in different words). Until you understand how they view things, you will not be able to help them understand your thinking.

I-messages on the Issue. The third principle is to speak in first person (“I” if singular and “we” if plural) and concentrate on the issue separating you rather than making personal attacks on other individuals. If you count the words “we,” “us,” “our,” and “ours” in verses 22-29 (NIV), you will find these first-person pronouns used 22 times in these eight verses, nearly three times per verse. On the contrary, you will find the second-person pronouns “you” and “your” used only five times, less than one per verse. How different this is from the “How could you? How could you?” used by Phineas in earlier verses. Using “I” does not mean that you are self-centered, only that you are talking about things as you see them. If you accuse others by using “you,” they are likely to become defensive and never understand what you are trying to get across.

Open to being the Offender. Fourth, admit that you may be the one in the wrong. You may be the one who has committed the offence. Notice that they tell other Israelites not to spare them “If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD...” (v. 22). They go on asking God to hold them responsible “If we have built our own altar to turn away...” (v.23). Being open to being in the wrong tends to diffuse emotions and lead to productive discussion.

Understanding before Unanimity. Finally, keep in mind that your goal is understanding on both sides. You are not trying to convince others that your position is the “right” one

and to agree that theirs is wrong. You want to understand their viewpoint and help them understand yours. This really happened in Joshua 22. When Phineas and his committee of ten finally understood, “they were pleased” (v. 30). If you do not reach understanding, the problem will surface again and again. People want to know that you understand them. They usually don’t care about how much you know until they know how much you care.

On the lines below write the names of people with whom you need to reconcile.

On the lines below (and an additional sheet of paper) write out a sample apology to one of the people you listed above.

Go over your apology to make sure that you

- A _____ the Almighty
 - E _____ your Excogitations
 - Used I- _____ on the Issue
 - Were O _____ to being the Offender
 - Sought U _____ before Unanimity
- Finally, have a trusted friend critique your apology and make suggestions for improving it.

Affirmation

Affirmation is the second step in building a RAFT. It is just a matter of letting others know that you appreciate them. It

is saying “Thank you” for being who you are or what you have done. When giving their explanation, Phineas and his committee noted that, the two and a half tribes had “rescued the Israelites from the LORD’S hand.” In fact, when Phineas returned and explained it to the other Israelites, “They were glad to hear the report and praised God” (v. 33).

Telling others you appreciate them may be difficult in many cultures. Perhaps this is because it may be interpreted as trying to make the person indebted to us in some way so that they feel obligated to do something for us. Rather than telling people how much we appreciate them while they are alive, we may wait until they are dead and give the compliment at a memorial service. How much better to say it when they are right there with you!

This appreciation may be expressed verbally face to face, over the phone or skype, in a letter, or in an email. It may be expressed in other culturally appropriate ways, such as a special small gift, an embrace, a pat on the back, or a special favor. Doing it sets us free to leave, helps others let go, and sets the stage for a warm reunion in the future.

Leadership is often a thankless position. As people often say, “It’s lonely at the top.” Every leader knows that it is impossible to please everyone under their authority all of the time. Even though you may have disagreed with many decisions your supervisor made, your affirmation can be a huge blessing for him or her. You may be quite surprised how grateful your leader may be for your thanks.

Being thankful is good for you as well as for the ones you thank. Thankful people have the following characteristics.

- More alert and enthusiastic
- More determined and attentive
- More energetic and optimistic

- More progress toward goals
- More exercise and better sleep
- More forgiving and helpful to others
- Higher immune response
- Closer family ties
- Less stress and envy
- Less resentment and greed
- Less bitterness and depression

On the lines below write the names of people you want to affirm.

Go and actually tell these people how much they have meant to you.

Farewells

Saying your farewells is the third step in building a RAFT. Don’t just leave. Say goodbye to people in a culturally appropriate way to bring closure to your time together. Do it in a setting that is comfortable for all involved. This may be having coffee together in your favorite shop, taking a walk together through a meaningful place, eating lunch together at a familiar restaurant, or having them over to your home for dinner.

List the people you want to tell goodbye.

In addition to people, say goodbye to special places. Of course, you do not need to do this verbally, but visit those

places remembering things that happened there. You may want to visit the university where you taught, the fellowship where you worshiped, the school your children attended, the hospital where you had a child, and so forth. Your children may also want to say goodbye to playgrounds, parks, and their rooms. List places you want to visit before you leave.

Goodbyes to pets may be more emotional than you expect. Dogs and cats which have been around your house for several years almost become members of the family. Children may become attached to the goldfish they have been feeding for years. As you leave them in someone else's care, remember the good times you had with them.

Other possessions you have may just be too large to take with you. So say goodbye to the table you sat around as a family, to the entertainment center where you saw great movies, and to the favorite dresser in your bedroom. As you sell or give these things away, be thankful you had them and think about what is ahead.

Think Destination

The final step in building your RAFT is to think about your destination. What are your expectations in going home? Just as you have said goodbye to many people, places, pets, and possessions, what do you look forward to saying hello to when you re-enter your culture? This is the time to plan for the future. Just as you are saying goodbye to some people, now is the time to begin reconnecting with other people in your passport country. Email and skype in this digital age make it

easier to plan when and where you will reunite. Begin to plan a schedule to greet family and friends when you get "home." Likewise as you bid goodbye to some places, now is the time to "look" for new places in your passport country. Where do you want to live geographically? Do you want to live in the north, south, east, west, or central part of the country? Urban or rural? What kind of housing do you want? A house to buy? To rent? An apartment? A dorm room? The Internet makes it possible to "look" for these while still in your host country—but it is a good idea to have a friend back home personally look at whatever you pick out. As you say goodbye to your current position, plan for your new one. What kind of work/study/ministry do you see in the future in your passport country? Again, you can explore what is available on-line and even fill out applications for employment or further study and send them as email attachments.

After you have built your RAFT, you are ready for the end of the leaving stage. If we return to Exodus 12 which we left to build our raft, we read that the Israelites "journeyed from Rameses to Succoth...At the end of the 430 years, to the very day" the Israelites left Egypt (Exodus 12:37, 41). The leaving stage was over. When they had first come to Egypt 430 years earlier, they had settled in Rameses (Genesis 47:11). Now they left Rameses as they ended the leaving stage which had lasted about a year.